

## NEW PUBLICATIONS.

FENELON.

**LES GRANDS ECRIVAINS FRANCAIS.** FENELON.  
Par Paul Janet, de l'Institut. 160 pp. pp. 206.  
Paris: Hachette et Cie. New-York: F. W. Chisholm.

The Archbishop of Cambrai was a man who combined in himself many qualities seemingly antagonistic. M. Paul Janet says of him: "Ancient and modern, Christian and pagan, mystic and politician, affable and aristocratic, gentle and obstinate, simple and erudite, enchanting the eighteenth century as he had enchanted the seventeenth, credulous as a child and audacious as Spinoza, Fenelon is one of the most original figures the Roman Catholic Church has produced." The singular reunion in him of opposite faculties and tendencies, however, cannot be said to have produced very satisfactory results, and despite the brilliancy of his career in many respects, it is impossible not to feel that the strangeness of the combination interfered seriously with his usefulness. Indeed, to realize clearly what he was and did it is necessary constantly to bear in mind the age in which he lived, and to compare his standards with those of the majority of his contemporaries. The first point to be noted is that he was in most respects in advance of his age. This was shown clearly enough in his first literary production; the essay on the education of girls.

The prevailing practice of his time might have been epitomized after "Punch's" fashion, thus:

"How to educate girls? Don't." Women were thought deserving of no other training than would fit them to become submissive and ineffectual wives. Their minds were suffered to lie fallow. One result of this was that if they were naturally bright, they worked out careers for themselves. Either they became "princesses," and bored their friends by spreading a very thin veneer of knowledge over a wide surface, or they fell into more serious mischief in other ways. Now Fenelon boldly took up his parable against the practice of his time, and advocated a comparatively broad education for girls. It cannot be said that his arguments had much effect. The idea was new, and a venerable prejudice was opposed to it. At least, however, it made people think, and so helped to prepare the way for better things. But it gives a good idea of the modernity of the young priest's views to be told by M. Janet that in many specific points this man of the seventeenth century anticipated Fourier, who was himself too advanced for the nineteenth. It was owing to his discourse on the education of girls that Louis XIV chose Fenelon to be preceptor of the young Duke of Burgundy, a post of great responsibility and high honor.

His present biographer, indeed, is of opinion that Fenelon overdid his part in this case. The Duke of Burgundy as a child and youth showed a very high and unruly spirit. Nobody had been able to control him until Fenelon came. He was a good deal of a cub, and even made people afraid with his frequent outbursts of temper and his arrogant self-will. Fenelon tamed and reformed him completely, and made of him a courteous gentleman and gracious prince. But in bringing about this transformation the preceptor somehow injured and weakened his spirit, and in after years he exhibited a lack of boldness and a hesitation, which had been lived to mount the throne as might have proved grave obstacles to his success as a ruler. It was entirely by moral suasion that Fenelon proceeded, and he displayed a wonderful address in this business; nor is it easy to understand how the methods which he employed could be made responsible for the change which took place subsequently in his pupil's character. It was fortunate for him that he was made Archbishop of Cambrai at this time, for the promotion would probably have been withheld had it not been accorded before the affair of Madame Guyon.

The story of this episode naturally occupies a prominent place in M. Janet's biography, and he has treated it with all the lucidity of which, perhaps, it is susceptible. But mysticism in any of its phases is always exceedingly difficult so to discuss that it may not appear madness; and the case of Madame Guyon is of kind to cause wonder at least, among average readers, at the momentous nature of the consequences. Those who have studied the subject do not need to be told that the heart of the question was what in ecclesiastical terminology has been called Contumacy. Now from this source sprang various delicate and dangerous speculations. Between Contumacy and heresy were several stages of self-absorption, concerning which the mystics held varying views. One, however, which the Church could by no possibility approve, was in line with a theory held by certain Perfectonists of the present century. It was to the effect that whoever had gone through certain psychical experiences had gained a state of sanctity in which it was no longer possible to commit mortal sin. The body therefore might perpetrate crimes of any kind, and no responsibility would be incurred. The mere announcement of such a doctrine condemned it; and it was held by many that Madame Guyon in some of her writings had enunciated the demoralizing doctrine. This she denied, and a committee of experts to which her works were submitted, acquitted her. But Fenelon's great colleague, Bossuet, was not clear that she was guilty, and just here Fenelon's mystic affinities put him in the opposite attitude.

The fierce and protracted quarrel which followed between the two prelates is a good illustration of the truth of the remark that men never contend so fiercely as when they are discussing a question which neither of them comprehends. Mysticism is an ideal subject for controversy, for all controversy about it resembles a dispute between people who inhabit worlds of differing dimensions. The Catholic Church has indeed definitely accepted some mystical doctrines, such as those of St. Teresa and St. Francis de Sales; and this establishes a kind of limit to dispute; but there remains ample ground and scope enough for controversy, and the battle of books between Bossuet and Fenelon sufficiently proves this. The fight went on with varying fortunes until the Sun King, who had espoused the side of Bossuet, and was minded to crush Fenelon, got the case transferred to Rome. There the Archbishop of Cambrai would have been safe, for the Pope, and most of the Cardinals favored him, but not Louis written to the Pope in so menacing and bullying a tone that the Court of the Vatican was literally frightened into giving a decision from which it revolted. Fenelon was exiled from Paris and Versailles and condemned to live in his diocese, and the remainder of his life was passed at his palace in Cambrai.

M. Janet of course has the inevitable chapter upon "Télémaque," and while awarding that work the conventional amount of praise, shows his real feeling by carefully pointing out how much of it is borrowed, how much is simply translation, and how very little original matter it contains. It was thought at the time to have been meant as a satire on the administration of Louis XIV, but the evidence that the king himself so regarded it seems very slender and inconclusive. Of course it is difficult for those unhappy foreigners who have had "Télémaque" imprinted on them in their youth as a means of learning French, to appreciate its literary merits later in life; and therefore it is probably with a certain malignant satisfaction that they will note the perfunctory character of M. Janet's laudations in this case. Fenelon as a philosopher does not strike us as surprising, save in the limitations of his knowledge. In a book intended to demonstrate the extraordinary blunder of asserting that the earth is motionless and that the sun revolves round it. As M. Janet remarks: "It was too much to ignore the great discovery of Copernicus and Galileo"—and M. Janet might have gone a good deal farther back than that. Fenelon's cosmic philosophy remained, in fact, mediæval, and in some respects it was far behind the conceptions of the best minds of the Middle Ages.

The last chapter, "Fenelon a Cambrai," gives a pleasing sport of the life of the Archbishop at home, showing that while he was no saint, but very human, he was much of an altruist, a sincere practical Christian, beloved by his people,

and devoted to benevolence, the reconciliation of enemies, and the general happiness and prosperity of all who were under his influence, or dependent upon him in any way. The biography is extremely well written, and full of interest throughout.

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